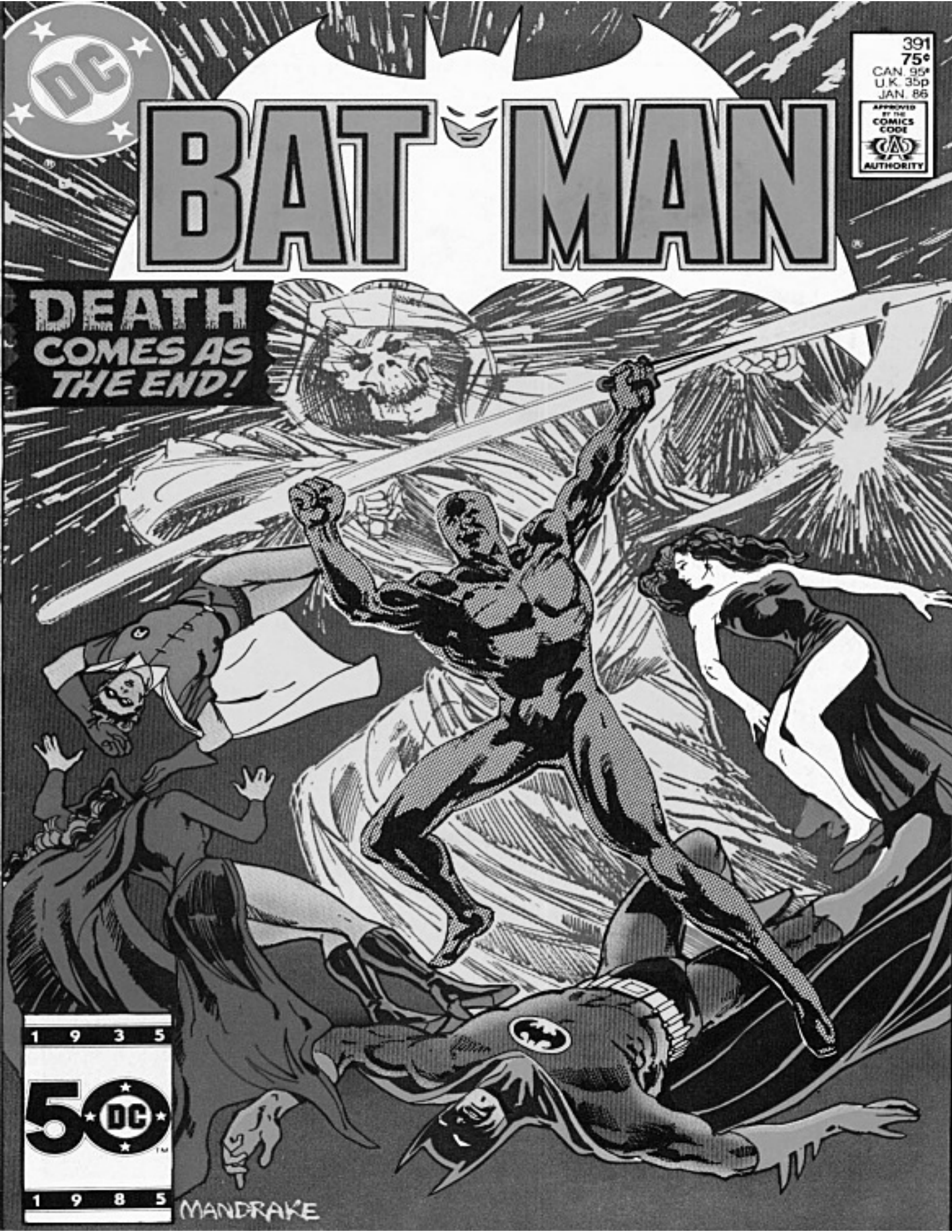


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BATMAN

DEATH
COMES AS
THE END!

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MANDRAKE

ATOP A TOWER ISOLATED BY EARTHQUAKE
AND AVALANCHE, NOCTURNA WAITS ALONE
IN HER OBSERVATORY FOR THE END.

STATIONED AT THE COASTY BASE OF THE
COLUMN AROUND WHICH SWIRLS THE FLOODING
RIVER, ROBIN HAS COME TO PROTECT HIS
EARTHWILE "MOTHER."

HE IS ABOUT TO FAIL.

DEATH,
BOY!

NIGHT-
SLAYER!!

I'VE BROUGHT
DEATH FOR
NOCTURNA-- AND
YOU'RE IN MY
WAY!

AND STILL THE
SCARLET STORM HOWLS,
LIKE THE VOICE OF MAD,
UNCARING DEATH.

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WRITER ARTIST LETTERER COLORIST EDITOR

G-2225

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INDEED, BOY-- YOU'RE ONE OF
THOSE WHO STEAL NOCTURNA'S
LOVE FROM ME!

--UHN!!

HWAK

KLUNK

I DON'T
BELIEVE IT! HIT
HIM WITH MY BEST
SHOT AND HE'S NOT
EVEN BUDS--

YOU'RE ONE OF
THOSE WHO MADE
HER BETRAY ME--

--AND THE
FACE OF HER
BETRAYAL IS
BLOOD!

GREEDILY, AND
TINGED PINK BY
RED RAINS, THE
FLOODWATERS
RISE.

THE HOSPITAL!

IT'S ALMOST FUNNY,
REALLY, AND PERHAPS
SUMS UP OUR ENTIRE
RELATIONSHIP.

WHEN THE POLICE
BLAMED ME FOR THE
MURDERS OF ALL THOSE
FALSE FACE SOCIETY THUGS,
I SIMPLY WANTED TO
CLEAR MYSELF...

HOW COULD I KNOW THAT NIGHT-SLAYER WAS COMMITTING THE MURDERS TO GET AT NOCTURNA... OR THAT YOU LOVE NOCTURNA?

I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU I MIGHT HAVE LOVED HER, SELINA-- IF NOT FOR HER USE OF A BOY NAMED JASON TODD.

HER STRANGE ALLURE EXERTS THAT MUCH FASCINATION... AND IT ALMOST BLINDED ME.

I ADMIT I ALMOST SUCCUMBED TO HER DESPITE THE FACT SHE'S A THIEF... DESPITE EVERYTHING.

BUT MY EYES WERE OPENED BY HER GAMBIT TO CHECKMATE BRUCE WAYNE, USING JASON TODD AS A PAWY.

SHE CLAIMS TO LOVE JASON AND PERHAPS IT'S TRUE.

HE'S A GOOD KID, EASY TO LOVE WITHIN DAYS OF KNOWING HIM.

BUT NOCTURNA WAS DETERMINED TO USE HIM BEFORE THEY'D EVEN MET.

THAT'S SOMETHING EVEN LOVE CAN'T OVERLOOK AND I'LL NEVER FORGIVE--

BATMAN? CAN YOU HEAR ME--?

EH? MY BELT-RADIO!

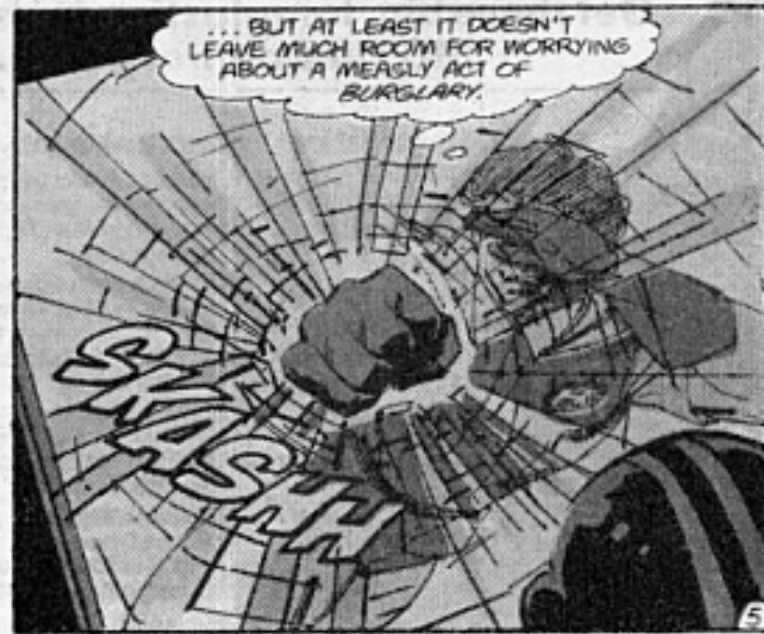
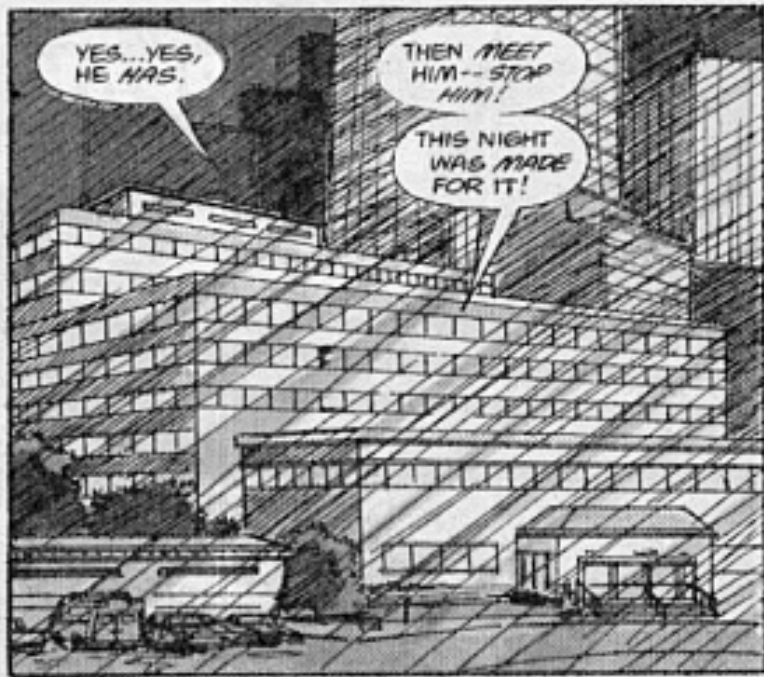
YES, ROBIN! WHAT IS IT?

THIS IS IT, BATMAN! NIGHT-SLAYER KNOWS WHERE NOCTURNA IS-- AND HE'S GONNA KILL HER!

I TRIED TO STOP HIM, BUT HE... HE'S NOT HUMAN.

THE SPEED HE'S CLIMBING-- LIKE A SPIDER-- NO WAY I CAN CATCH HIM...!





IT... IT'S HARDER THAN I THOUGHT...

FEEL LIKE A HEAVY LOAD THAT'S LASHED TOO LOOSE...

AND MY POOR COSTUME... RIPPED UP BY THAT LIGHTNING EVEN WORSE THAN I WAS...

EN?

MISS KYLE! WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING?

GETTING OUT OF HERE.

BUT YOU'RE IN NO CONDITION TO--

--GO FOR A WALK IN THE LOVELY RED RAIN?

JUST WATCH ME, FLORENCE.

HERE, NOW, YOU DON'T WANT US TO RESTRAIN YOU, DO YOU?

NOPE... AND WHEN WILL I EVER LEARN THAT WHEN IT COMES TO AUTHORITY FIGURES--

--ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS.

UNFF!

OOPH!



NOTHING
CAN STOP THE
DEATH OF
THE NIGHT...

NOTHING...

GOTHAM OBSERVATORY

NOTHING
AT ALL...

I'VE FOUND
YOU, NOCTURNA.

ANTON...
NIGHT-
SLAYER...

... AT
LAST.

YOU
KILLED
OUR LOVE,
NATALIA.

WHEN YOU STARTED
KILLING PEOPLE,
ANTON.

YOU MUST
PAY FOR
IT.

YES...



YOU
MUST
DIE.

YES... I
KNOW.



AND ON THE MAINLAND CLIFF
OPPOSITE THE OBSERVATORY...

NEVER REALIZED HOW
FLIMSY A HANG-
GLIDER IS...

... ESPECIALLY
IN WIND LIKE
THIS.



YOU DON'T
CARE?

THERE IS
NOTHING I CAN DO
ABOUT THE APPROACHING
CATACLYSM, ANTON... AND
IF I CANNOT THWART THE
DEATH OF THE *MEAT*, THEN
I MAY AS WELL DIE
MYSELF.

WHY NOT
AT THE HANDS
OF THE NIGHT-
SLAYER?



GOT THIS IDEA FROM
THE TERRORIST
DARKWOLF...



BUT DARKWOLF
SURE AS HECK DIDN'T
TRY HIS HANG-GLIDER
STUNT IN A RED
TYPHOON!

AND HE IS
IMMEDIATELY
SWEEPED UP AND
AWAY FROM
THE OBSERVATORY...

-- AS IF BUFFETED BY THE
SHOCKWAVE OF NIGHT-SLAYER'S
ABRUPTLY EXPLODING WRATH.

YOU'VE
BETRAYED
ME,
NATALIA--

-- GIVEN
YOUR LOVE TO
SOMEONE
ELSE!

GOTTA FIGHT THE CONTROLS--

-- TRY TO CATCH
A DOWNDRAFT
BEFORE I'M BLOWN
AWAY--

--OR BLASTED
BY THE RED
LIGHTNING!

YOU'RE
WRONG,
ANTON-- YOU
MURDERED
THE LOVE
WE ONCE
SHARED.

NO SIGN OF ROBIN OR
NIGHT-SLAYER...

THE NEXT BOLT
SIZZLES WITHIN
FEET OF THE
YOUTH--

YOW! I CAN
FEEL THIS
ONE!

CHOOOM

-- AND
NEARLY
STRIKES
HIS
MENTOR.

FAR TOO
CLOSE...

GOT TO CLIMB
FASTER--

--REACH
THE
OBSERVATORY...

FINALLY SHE TURNS, THE WHISPER OF HER
GOWN LIKE A GISH UNDER MOONLIGHT...



...AND WITH
FATAL DIGNITY,
SHE OFFERS HER
FLESH TO HIS
BLADE.

THIS IS AS CLOSE AS I'LL
EVER GET!



NO
CHOICE
NOW...

GOT TO
RISK
EVERYTHING--



--AND
JUMP!



HIGH IN HER BREAST,
JUST BELOW THE
SHOULDER, THE PAIN
IS GREATER THAN SHE
EXPECTED, ITS EFFECT
LESS THAN SHE WANTED.

AGAIN,
ANTON.

YOU ARE THE NIGHT-SLAYER
AND I AM NIGHT.



FINISH
THE DEED.

AND THE SCARLET
LIGHTNING SHOWS
IT ALL, AS IF THROUGH
A HAZE OF BLOOD.



NOOOOO!!



GET AWAY FROM HER!!



YOU--!



ROBIN!



TUP



SHUMP

AND NOW, EVEN AS THE BLOOD FLOWS, A RED LINE PLAYING OUT, CASTING HER FARTHER AND FARTHER INTO THE FINAL DARKNESS--



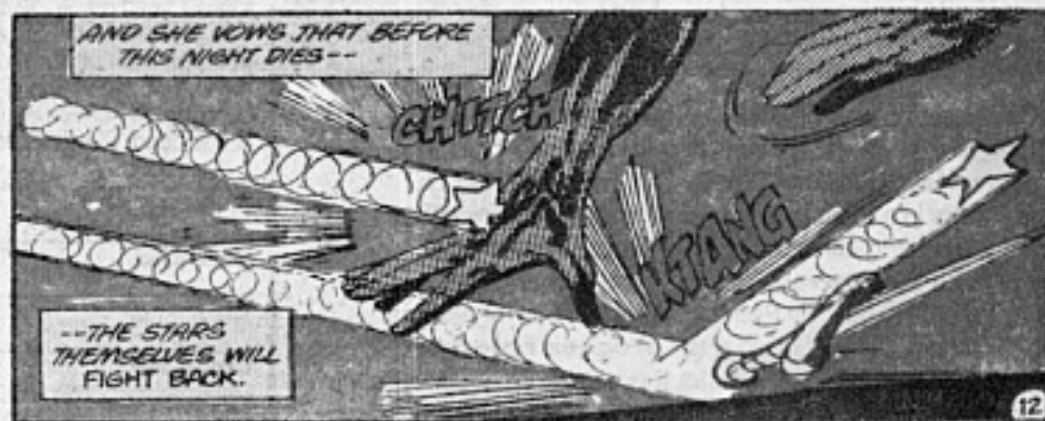
-- SHE REALIZES IT IS NOT WHAT SHE WANTS.

ROBIN... MY SON...



THE SIGHT OF THE YOUNG BOY BRAVING A DEATH IN HER BEHALF IS TOO MUCH TO BEAR--AND SHE KNOWS SHE CANNOT LEAVE NOW.

HOW DARE YOU STRIKE MY SON?!



AND SHE VOWS THAT BEFORE THIS NIGHT DIES--

--THE STARS THEMSELVES WILL FIGHT BACK.

CHITCH

WANG

A FURY NOW, SHE RISES UP FROM
THE DEMON'S DARKNESS.



NOCTURNA



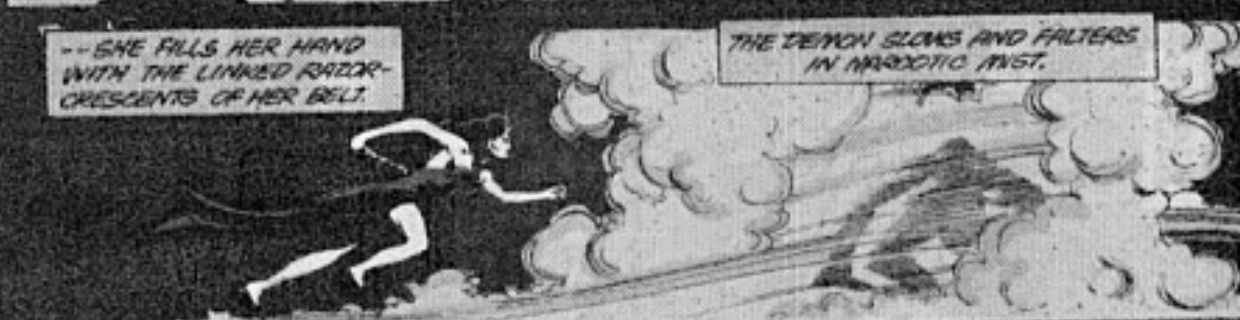
AND EVEN AS THE HOLLOW
FULL-MOON PEARLS OF
HER NECKLACE EXPLODE...

PHOOM

ALMOST
THERE...

--SHE FILLS HER HAND
WITH THE LINKED RAZOR-
CRESCENTS OF HER BELT.

THE DEMON SLOWS AND FALTERS
IN NARCOTIC INST.



AGH-H!

SHE FLAILS THE FLAMING
FOG, SCORCHING HIS BACK...



--BUT THE RED
LINE FLOWS
FASTER NOW...

... AND IF
THE NEXT
EARTH-
QUAKE
WILL JUST
HOLD OFF
ANOTHER
FEW
SECONDS...



...DRIVEN BY
THE ANGER
AND FURY OF
HER HEART...

...STERLING HER STRENGTH,
LEAVING HER DEEPER AND
DEEPER IN WEAKNESS.



MADE IT!

EVEN THE ~~BRAT~~ YOU
LOVE MORE THAN
ME!



SHE WAS A FOOL TO WELCOME
THE FIRST BLOW--AND NOW SHE
CAN RECEIVE THE REST WITH
NOTHING BUT PRIDEFULLY FUTILE
OPPOSITION.

--AND THE BATMAN
KNOWS IT.

I LOVE YOU,
NOCTURNA!
I LOVE
YOU!!



TWICE MORE THE
BLADE BITES,
MORE DEEPLY
EACH TIME--UNTIL
THE NEXT WILL
SURELY SLAY HER.

THEN!



NO MORE THAN A BLUR
FLASHING ON THE STILETTO'S
SURFACE, IT IS HARDLY ENOUGH
TO HALT THE FRENZIED PLUNGE--



GET DOWN,
NOCTURNA-- AND
STAY DOWN!

B-BATMAN...
GOTTA H-HELP...



DON'T EVEN
TRY IT,
ROBIN!



TEND TO
NOCTURNA--TO
NATALIA!

YEAH... GOTTA GET HER AWAY... INTO THE NEXT ROOM...

YOUR BALLOON, NATALIA-- AND ANOTHER APERTURE IN THE CEILING IN HERE...

LISTEN-- THE BATMAN'S HURT NOW, TOO, AND I'M NOT SURE EVEN HE CAN STOP NIGHT-SLAYER... SO I'VE GOTTA GET YOU OUT OF HERE, UNDERSTAND?

BUT THE DARK, PALE WOMAN SAYS NOTHING.

MEANWHILE--

--A STOLEN HELICOPTER STRUGGLES UP FROM THE AIRPORT TO DROVE THROUGH RED CHAOS.

EASY, NATALIA...

IT'S ALMOST INFLATED NOW...

LOSING TOO MUCH BLOOD...

BUT HE'S STILL FIGHTING LIKE A MANIAC...

IT... IT'S JUST ABOUT READY, NATALIA...

AS SOON AS I GET THE CEILING APERTURE OPENED, I... I'LL CAST YOU OFF...

THINKING OF THE BALLOON, HE RECALLS HOW FOUL WAS THE HANG-GLIDER... AND YET, THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.

THE STILETTO IS TOO CERTAIN, BUT THE NIGHT-- EVEN A GASHED AND BLEEDING ONE-- IN HER ELEMENT, FOR BETTER OR WORSE.





G-GOOD-BYE,
NATALIA...

...AND I HOPE
I DON'T SEE
YOU SOON...

... NOT
TOO SOON
ANYWAY...

EVEN AS THE BALLOON
IS SWEEP AWAY BY FIERCE
WINDS, THE WORST OF IT
FEELS LIKE A DAGGER IN
HIS SOUL: FOR ALL HE
KNOWS, NATALIA KNIGHT
IS ALREADY DEAD.

WAIT! THAT LEVER--
LOCKING THE POSITION
OF THE GIANT
TELESCOPE...

BUT I CAN'T
EVEN REACH THAT
IN TIME...

HWAK

...UNLESS--

THE BATMAN
CRAWLS.

SELINA'S
IN NO
CONDITION
TO HANDLE
HIM...

...AND IN MY
SHAPE, I MAY
NEVER EVEN REACH
THEM, LET ALONE
IN TIME...

FWIMP

IT'S NO USE... THE
ANGLE'S ALL
WRONG...

...AND I'VE
SIMPLY LOST TOO
MUCH STRENGTH!

THE BLACK BALLOON IS
FINALLY SWALLOWED
FROM SIGHT, AND ROBIN
TURNS FROM HIS REVERIE.

GOT TO DO IT!
GOT TO CAUSE
A DISTRACTION
BEFORE SELINA
IS KILLED

-- AND HE ACTS
ON IT.

HE SIZES THE
SITUATION THROUGH
A BLUR OF TEARS--

SKAKT

THE
TELESCOPE,
CATWOMAN--
MOVE!!

THE COLLAPSING
TELESCOPE CLIPS
NIGHT-SLAYER
ACROSS THE BASE
OF HIS SKULL.

HE STUMBLES
DRUNKENLY FORWARD...
AND CATWOMAN
DOES MOVE...

WAKT

IT IS HER
OWN UNDOING.

NOOOOOO

...HURLING
HERSELF AT HIS
ANKLES.

AND NOW THE BIG
EARTHQUAKE STRIKES--
DISMANTLING THE
PRECARIOUS TOWER
FROM THE BOTTOM UP.



DON'T GIVE UP, BATMAN!

WHEN WE HIT THE RIVER, WE'VE GOTTA SWIM!



YOU HEAR ME, BATMAN?!

DON'T GIVE UP!!



YOU'VE GOTTA FIGHT, BATMAN! THE JLA AND THE OUTSIDERS NEED YOU!

THE WORLD MAY NEED YOU!!

AND WHETHER SPURRED BY ROBIN OR BRACED BY THE FRIGID WATERS---



--HE SOMEHOW FINDS THE STRENGTH.

WE...WE MADE IT, BATMAN... WE'RE STILL ALIVE.

YES... BUT WH-WHAT ABOUT--



--SELINA?



OH, NO... OH, GOD, NO...

EASY, BATMAN... EASY.

WHATEVER YOU ARE UP THERE,
YOU WON'T WIN--DO YOU
HEAR?!

I'LL
FIGHT YOU
UNTIL EVERY
LAST DROP OF
MY BLOOD
HAS--

E-EASY
ON THE
EARS,
FRIEND...

EH?

I WARNED YOU I
WOULDN'T STOP MY
MANHUNT--AND
WHAT DID YOU SO
LONG? THOUGHT
I'D HAVE TO DRAG
THIS MADMAN IN
BY MYSELF...

CATWOMAN!

THEN ALL IS SILENT SAVE FOR THE CRACK OF THUNDER
AND HOWL OF WIND, AS ROBIN TURNS AWAY, STARING
PAST THE STUB OF WHAT WAS ONCE A HIGH TOWER CLOSE
TO THE NIGHTED HEAVENS...

NOCTURNA...?

GONE,
CATWOMAN...

"... GONE WHERE WE MAY NEVER SEE HER AGAIN."

DEFLATED LONG MINUTES
FAST, THE BALLOON NEVERTHE-
LESS REMAINS ALOFT, Borne
BY HURRICANE WINDS INTO
THE VERY HEART OF THE
"FRAYING EFFECT"...

... AS THE WORLD
ITSELF IS WRAPPED
EVER MORE TIGHTLY
IN A CRIMSON
CLOAK OF DOOM.

I'M SORRY
FOR YOU,
BATMAN...

...SO SORRY...
FOR BOTH
OF YOU...

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF DETECTIVE COMICS: THE ORIGIN
REACHES EARTH! AND IN THE NEXT BATMAN, A
NIGHT ON THE TOWN SPELLS **TROUBLE!**

